

SUPERVISING POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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OUTLINE

1. CHALLENGES

- ◉ Selecting students
- ◉ Identifying students' strengths
- ◉ Negotiating a topic
- ◉ Motivation and quitting
- ◉ Academic and non-academic support

2. OPPORTUNITIES

- ◉ Group supervision and synergy
- ◉ Enabling research
- ◉ Developing new areas
- ◉ Rewards

SELECTING STUDENTS

- ◉ Internal applicants

- ◉ External applicants

HONOURS?

- 1st class honours = first class research student?

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- ⦿ 1st class honours = first class research student?
- ⦿ Students can get As by doing what is expected
- ⦿ As are no guarantee of originality or motivation

IDENTIFYING A STUDENT'S STRENGTHS

- ◉ Does the student deserve to be accepted?
- ◉ Does the student show promise for the kind of work you want to supervise?

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- ◉ Does the student deserve to be accepted?
- ◉ Does the student show promise and motivation for the kind of work you want to supervise?

Not sure?

- ◉ Ask them to revise or develop their proposal
- ◉ Employ them as temporary RA to see what their capabilities and limits are

NEGOTIATING A TOPIC

Student's proposal as a starting point:

- ⦿ Often not feasible as it stands
- ⦿ Often too ambitious

Brainstorming stage

TOPIC AND MOTIVATION

- Assign a topic?

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- The topic has to engage the student for 2-4 years

WHEN STUDENTS WANT TO QUIT

- ◉ Motivation
- ◉ Self-confidence
- ◉ Personal problems

PERSUADING STUDENTS TO CONTINUE

- Reassurance

- Patience

SUPPORT: ACADEMIC

- ◉ Be prepared to work during evenings and weekends at crucial points in a student's candidacy
- ◉ Sometimes we need to go through the crucial papers or procedures with the student
- ◉ Be positive: say 'good try', 'good effort' or 'nice idea, but...' before getting into problems

SUPPORT: NON-ACADEMIC

- Psychological problems
 - Mental health first aid (certificate)
 - Counselling

CONFLICT

- ◉ Academic differences of opinion
- ◉ Supervisor not satisfied with progress
- ◉ Supervisor making unjustified demands

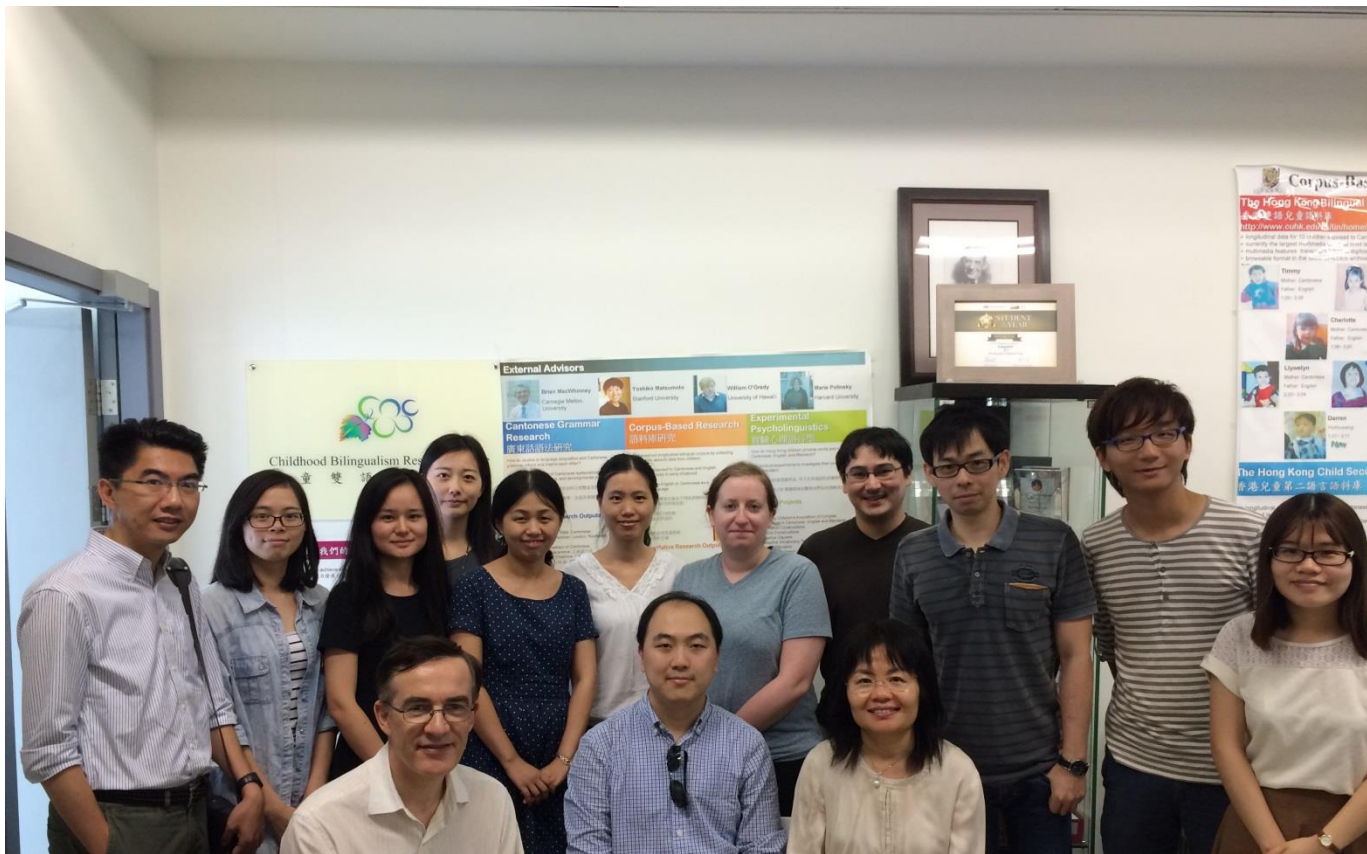
- ◉ Co-supervisor(s) and/or mentor as back-up
- ◉ Change of principal supervisor may be necessary

OPPORTUNITIES

- Creating synergy
- Enabling research
- Exploring new fields

GROUP SUPERVISION AND SYNERGY

- Pairs/groups working on related topics learn from each other
- Lab meetings: the Childhood Bilingualism Research Centre, CUHK



ENABLING RESEARCH

Students may have skills that we lack as supervisors:

- ◉ Design
- ◉ Programming
- ◉ Experimental skills



Bachelor of Cognitive Science graduates:
Experimental design, programming, statistics

DEVELOPING NEW AREAS

- Third language acquisition: Bilingual Hong Kong students learning French/German/Japanese



REWARDS

- ◉ Co-authorship
- ◉ HKU: a supervisor who makes a substantive contribution should be credited as co-author
- ◉ Awards for students and supervisors

REWARDS

- Students become colleagues/friends



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